Acton and History

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I

THE MAKING OF A HISTORIAN

ACTON was born in 1834, only son of a baronet and squire of Aldenham in Shropshire. The family owned Aldenham Hall since the fourteenth century. The first Acton to be a baronet won the title when he stood by King Charles I at the beginning of the English civil war. The future sixth baronet, rather distant by descent from the Aldenham family, became an officer in the Tuscan navy. He did so well in Mediterranean fights that he was invited to reorganize the navy of the Kingdom of Naples; from which place he was soon in control of the exchequer and then was Prime Minister and the favourite of Queen Caroline. He was the Prime Minister when Nelson moored the British fleet at Naples and first met Emma Hamilton. In the midst of this power he succeeded unexpectedly to the Aldenham title and estate. At the age of sixty-four he married his niece (the marriage needed a dispensation from the Pope) and had two sons, both of whom died young: Richard, our Acton's father, the seventh baronet who died at the age of thirty-four, and Charles who became a cardinal and died when he was forty-four. Sir Richard married a German, the daughter of the Duke of Dalberg, with her family seat at Herrnsheim in the Rhineland. But the Dalberg family co-operated with Napoleon when he broke up the Holy Roman Empire and so, when Napoleon lost the battle of Waterloo, their position was not comfortable and they were no longer a wealthy family.

When our John Acton was one year old his father died in

Paris and was buried at St Thomas' church; and the baby became the eighth baronet. As a child he was delicate and subject to attacks of quinsy.[1] He was known comically to his mother as Lord Patapouf.[2] At the age of eight was sent by his mother and new step-father Leveson (soon to be Earl Granville) to school in Paris, a rather aristocratic place for little boys under the general oversight of the most famous confessor in Paris, the Abbé Dupanloup. There he was taught by the curé of St Thomas (whom he enjoyed) and into adult life when he went to church in Paris he liked to go to St Thomas's because it was the place of his unknown father's funeral.[3]

His mother when in Paris used Dupanloup as her confessor; and an affection grew up between them, and she made sure that Dupanloup cared about her son's younger education. She received a report from Dupanloup on the boy: 'he is firm, open, decided'.

For his secondary education he was sent to the Roman Catholic College of Oscott near Birmingham. He was idle.

There were rows between the young adolescent and the masters at Oscott. But he grew; and the growth was helped by the undertaking that if he worked hard and got true academic results, they would send him abroad for a year to study; he began to work very hard, so that his step-father could even congratulate him on his new 'thirst for knowledge'.

After Oscott his family mulled half-heartedly on whether he should go to Oxford or Cambridge. At Oxford he must profess the faith of the Church of England at entry and therefore that was impossible. At Cambridge he would only have to profess the faith of the Church of England on taking a degree, and therefore it was theoretically possible to go as undergraduate to Cambridge and not to receive the BA degree; and his own uncle, who had become a cardinal, had studied as an undergraduate at

[1] 8121/6/146.
[2] 8121/6/172.
[3] 8121/7/862.

Magdalene College. His step-father, a loyal Anglican, was convinced that this Catholic boy would do better to have his higher education among other English young people so that he should not in future life be 'odd' and would be a familiar part of the society in which he would have to live as a squire. Married to a devout Catholic wife, Granville had no desire to convert her son out of Catholicism, but he wanted 'English normality' in education, so that Acton should not be different from all his contemporaries and so be at a disadvantage. But this plan of going to Cambridge depended on whether a college was willing to accept him – which meant, accepting a student who broke the college rules by not worshipping in the college chapel. And although Magdalene College had accepted his uncle on these terms, recent decades had made everyone fussy about such rules, and approaches for such exemptions for Acton were unsuccessful.

It was agreed therefore that he should go to Munich university for one year where he could learn German and study and then come back to England to try again for Cambridge or perhaps one of the Scottish universities where the same rules were flexible or perhaps London university where there were no such rules. Granville regarded it as very desirable that the higher education should be in Britain. He had no idea that when they sent him to Munich they took one of the two most decisive steps of Acton's life.

Munich had the advantage; the Arco-Valley family, seat at St Martin near Ried in Upper Austria, but with a villa at Tegernsee near Munich, and with much employment over the centuries from the Bavarian government, were related to the Actons by marriage. The Arco family was originally from the Northern Trentino in the Middle Ages and so under the prince-bishopric of Trent. Since the fifteenth century the family had served much in government service for Austria or Bavaria, often in the Italian portion of the Holy Roman Empire. The present count was Maximilian who had married Anna the daughter of the Marquis Marescalchi of Bologna and of a Brignole-Sale, a family of Paris.

Hence, when Acton became a sort of member of the Arco-Valley family, he had an easy base not only in Munich, and at the Arco-Valley chateau at St Martin in Upper Austria, but in Italy at Bologna and in France at Paris.

The Arcos could look after the young man. They arranged that the one-year student should move into an austere bedroom as a lodger in the house of the professor of church history, Döllinger. In June 1850 aged sixteen and a half Acton arrived at Munich. The bed was uncomfortable. Ever afterwards he regarded the room which he then occupied as haunted with breaths of inspiration – 'the best and happiest recollections of my boyhood'.[4]

It was intended to be a visit of a year or more before he came back to a British university and his mother and step-father did not suppose that Munich was to be his university. The meeting with Döllinger proved to be an epoch in the life of both tutor and pupil. Acton found the father he had never known, Döllinger discovered the son whom as a celibate priest he could not beget. He found a gifted boy, who earlier in his education had been idle, but now was on fire for scholarship. He made him work very hard.

And now there were two different pressures upon his future course. His Protestant step-father wanted an English education, if possible at an old university. The Catholics must take a different view. Here was the heir to one of the few great Catholic places in English society. He must be brought up a devout convinced and loyal Catholic. To send him to Protestant Cambridge or religionless London was to risk his steadiness of conviction. Döllinger had the reputation at that moment of being the weightiest defender of the Pope and the Catholic faith in all Germany. It must please leading Catholics of England that their young hopeful studied under his care.

But the argument was settled by the teenage subject of these

[4] 8121/7/825.

discussions. It was no longer a doubt of where best to study. It had become now a question of affection, filial. He had started to idolise Döllinger. The prospect of studying anywhere else was very unattractive.

The step-father did not give way without a fight. He was sure that it was a future disadvantage to Acton in an English life to have had a higher education outside Britain. He said so to Acton, more than once. Acton rashly argued to him that higher education produced a freedom from prejudice as its best objective and that he would be far more free from conventional English prejudices if he finished his higher education at Munich instead of Britain:

Granville wrote to Acton on 21 July 1852:

I rejoice in your hatred of prejudices, convinced as I am of the difficulty of avoiding them, especially by those who pique themselves the most on their freedom from any, but when you demonstrate that England France Italy and Northern Germany are incapable of affording you the means of continuing that course of study which you have begun so well in Munich, and that the latter place is absolutely the only one fitted for this purpose it appears that you prove a little too much.

I should regret extremely your adoption of English prejudices, but unless at your critical age you imbibe some sympathy with the peculiar feelings of the people with whom you are to act thro' life, I am afraid that you will not obtain that sympathy from them without which your powers of being useful must be diminished.

However, mother and step-father consented that he should stay for one more year's study at Munich. They hoped that he would not confine his studies to medieval history, which was Döllinger's strength and Acton's new love. Granville told him that physical science is important today.[5]

Acton later gave a picture of his own development – a young man who totally accepted that the faith in which he was brought up 'is morality and truth, absolutely without any weak point'.

[5] Granville to Acton (from Carlsbad), 21 July 1852, 8121/6/67ff.

Looking back he knew that at that time he had a strong tendency to hero-worship.[6]

'Endurance' was a gift which Acton attributed to his time under Döllinger.[7] It was not the only gift which afterwards he thought that he learnt in that house – also habits of thoughtfulness, patience, clearness and confidence.

It happened that Döllinger was on his academic travels. Two months after he arrived at Munich Döllinger took him with him through Switzerland to Milan and met Italian scholars and then came back through Vienna. In May 1851 Döllinger took his now seventeen-year-old pupil on a visit to the Catholics of England. They visited the new converts to Rome, Manning and Hope Scott; they called on Gladstone who had decided not to follow the others to Rome, and heard him speak in Parliament and Döllinger did not like him; they went to Birmingham and called on Newman, recently settled to make the Oratory there, and found that Newman was bothered about the crowning of Napoleon by Pope Plus VII and Döllinger defended the Pope to Newman. Then they went to Oxford and visited the surviving leaders of the Oxford Movement and dined with Mozley in Magdalene and with Marriott in Oriel; and saw Church in Oriel and Pusey in Christ Church; and lastly they went to London and saw the new Cardinal Wiseman. It was a very privileged tour for an impressionable and adolescent hereditary Catholic.[8] They were both ultramontanes. Döllinger was regarded as the historical leader of the ultramontane movement in Germany, who could show how Protestants corrupted the history of the Church. The adolescent Acton shared his master's viewpoint absolutely. Protestants were the enemies and better history could prove that they were not only wrong but immoral in their use of history.

In the next year 1852 (he was eighteen) Döllinger took him

[6] Conz., III, p. 288, June 1882.
[7] 8121/7/826.
[8] Friedrich, *Döllinger*, III, p. 105.

again into Switzerland and Italy and they visited the pilgrimage sanctuary of Einsiedeln and worked in the library at Florence. The place that was truly important to him was Venice; for the Austrians had opened the Venetian state archives and for the first time in his life Acton was able to learn history from original documents instead of other people's books. It was a lesson he did not forget. He always looked back on Venice with gratitude as an experience essential in his training as a historian.[9]

In the year after that he was in Paris and at parties heard gossip against Dupanloup who had been made the Bishop of Orleans not to everyone's pleasure, and heard rumours against the Emperor Napoleon and the Empress Eugénie, and associated with several of the leading French Liberal Catholics. But his not Liberal state of mind may be shown by his vehement assertion that Eckstein was the giant among historians; and Eckstein, despite his German name, was the historian who represented in historical work the extreme Catholic right wing in France.[10]

But he was impressed by a statesman among the French Liberal Catholics – the Count de Falloux.

Looking back he felt Falloux to be the most distinguished of them, his refinement and yet his spirit and his person 'full of point'. It puzzled the young Acton that Falloux could be a very pious Catholic and at the same time a Legitimist for the Bourbons on one side and a Liberal in politics on the other. The spectacle of Falloux seems to have widened Acton's vision of what was possible.

All this was not easy to reconcile and harmonize, and this difficulty, together with the fact that he belonged essentially to the defeated minority, developed an extraordinary artfulness, dexterity and tact, which his nobility of manner, and his religious tone, prevented from degenerating into deceit and falseness . . . He was in my opinion grossly superficial, not scrupulous, and in later years disgusted and nervous, but at

[9] Cf. to Annie, no. 126, 12 April 1896.
[10] Cf. FL I, p. 18.

his best very able, dominating, high-spirited, and the greatest statesman the Catholic party had produced.[11]

He felt later that he owed these French Liberal Catholics a good deal 'in the way of light and help'.

Not without much doubt on the part of both Döllinger and his step-father, lest he interrupt his education too sharply, he went to the United States. The expedition did not lead him then to admire the United States.[12]

In 1853–4 Döllinger gave a course in Munich university on the French Revolution. Acton found this course to be 'a revelation' to him[13] by which he must mean that it was formative of his historical ideals.

In 1854 he was twenty. Because of Döllinger and all that had happened he had grown out of any form of adolescent revolt against his mother and step-father – 'What immense pleasure', wrote Granville to Acton, 'to see the development of all your great qualities and I cannot say how much I feel your manner towards your mother and me'.[14]

Acton had another chance of widening his range. Granville was appointed the English representative at the coronation of the new Russian Tsar. This was very interesting and an honour but a worry because Parliament only allowed him £10,000 for expenses – 'stingy' said Granville to Acton, and he knew that his expenses must exceed that if he were to appear properly and had little private money to supplement the grant. Acton went on ahead to St Petersburg and Moscow and arranged accommo-

[11] To Annie, no. 64, 7 April 1893. She was trying to study Liberal Catholicism. By the time he wrote that judgement he knew that Falloux had died in disgrace among both royalists and ultramontane Catholics.

[12] Part of his diary in the United States, printed in *Fortnightly Review*, November 1921 and January 1922.

[13] To Jeannette Döllinger, 8121/6/645.

[14] 8121/6/68 from Aldenham, 26 December 1854. His step-father asked him about Aldenham. Under the will of his father the house and gardens were left in trust for Acton's mother during her lifetime and she and Lord Granville were living there. The difficulty now was that money needed spending on it and Granville saw he could not spend money on the estate if he would soon lose it because his step-son married and needed it.

dation and equipment including eight black horses for his coach and a handsome harness and the hire of stables – everything for thirteen attachés and one doctor as well as Granville's wife who was Acton's mother.[15] There was no point in his after life when he admired the Russian system of government.

The year after that Döllinger took him again to Italy and for the first time Acton saw Rome. He fell in love with the city. He felt this first visit to be an epoch in his life. He thought people ought to go round it not with one guide-book but with three, and not be afraid of going over the same ground again and again. He found St Peter's the most fascinating because of its history, (but it 'leaves one cold – can pray better in Gothic churches')[16]; Santa Maria Maggiore the loveliest, and the Minerva next most interesting. He was in the congregation at St Peter's when the silver trumpets carried on the high notes as the voices died away at the elevation of the sacrament and found it a superb moment. 'It makes my heart throb when I set foot in the churches there'.[17] It is the place, he later told his daughter, 'that I love best in the world'.

Though he remembered that Popes had done harm, the memory did not lessen his ecstasy with papal Rome. 'Remember how long Rome has been the centre of religious history on the earth, and never allow that sublime thought to be darkened by shadows of earth, and the mass of evil and of wrong pressing on what is holy. Edification is from God, very rarely indeed from man.' Again and again he went back to his favourite monuments of history – the tomb of Sixtus, the monument of Innocent, the head of Antony, and the head of Scipio. 'Nothing helps one to realize the past as Rome does . . . It is there I learned to find the dead so terribly alive, that they are nearer to me than the events of the day . . .' This was Döllinger's only visit to Rome and he was surprised at the friendliness which met him. Acton kept a

[15] 8121/6/70.
[16] Rome diary, 22 June 1856; the diary was part printed by Herbert Butterfield in *CHJ*, 8 (1946), 186ff.
[17] Acton to Annie, nos. 122–3, 2–3 March 1896.

diary of the Rome visit which, a sign of discipleship, he mostly used for jotting down remarks by his teacher.

Döllinger took him to an audience with the Pope. It was the first time that Acton saw and met the Vatican archivist Theiner who was to prove so important to his historical studies. For Theiner stood beside the Pope at the audience, no doubt in case the German language should be needed – but they spoke French, the Pope speaking it badly. Acton was impressed by Theiner – he 'is more in the Pope's confidence than anybody'. Döllinger told him that Theiner had obtained permission to publish the acts of the Council of Trent, hitherto kept very secret.

A week later Acton had a family audience with the Pope – his Dalberg grandmother whom he called Nonna, two English cousins and a Dalberg cousin. Nonna was famous for her Catholic piety and known to the Pope and she presented them. The Pope knew about Acton because his uncle had been a cardinal. She made Acton talk a little; and the Pope said he 'had heard so much of our brilliancy, and of my mother's religiousness' from Monsignor Chigi (who was then the nuncio to Bavaria); and gave them his blessing.

Acton had a third audience on 12 June 1857, a month after the first. This time they talked on English affairs and English statesmen, little to the credit of Palmerston and even less to the credit of Gladstone – the Pope not knowing that he spoke to a young man who later was to be the closest to Gladstone of all the British.

Acton, ecstatic about his discovery of papal Rome, was not very impressed with the Pope: a likeable man, and kind, and generous, but fat, and taking a deal of snuff, and rather torpid, and old, and weak, and caring nothing about things of the mind, and leaving all the administration of the Papal State to his henchmen – that was how he recorded his experience of Pius IX.

Acton came away sure that the city of Rome satisfied his religious heart; and with a sense of political trouble ahead – the contrast between the holy city with its clerical government, and

the showmen and gamblers and lotteries and torch-light dancers and riders or mule-drivers maltreating their animals terribly and violence in bars and 'peacock-flunkies that block up the approaches of cardinals' – could it survive as it was?[18]

That autumn he unexpectedly became the half-owner of a Catholic English periodical, the *Rambler*. The managers needed money to keep going so they approached a Catholic aristocrat with an estate. It was English and intelligent which meant not many Catholic readers (never more than 1,000), for Irish readers had other journals. So it struggled. It also struggled because bishops found its intelligence daring enough to be disturbing.

Acton had an aim which precisely fitted the goals of the *Rambler*. Educated at a first-class university in Germany, he saw the failure of Catholic higher education in England. He wanted better Catholic schools, if possible a Catholic university. It was Newman's aim, and of various of the converts who while Anglicans had been educated at Oxford. He and they did not hope to make Protestants agree with them but wanted Catholic thought not to be despised by Protestants as contemptible.

In becoming a proprietor Acton inherited another proprietor and writer for the paper – Richard Simpson, an ex-Anglican from Newman's Oriel College and a first-class mind. Posterity argued whether Simpson was bad for Acton or not. For Simpson had literary force; cared not at all whether he offended pious readers; was a deeply religious person who diminished his influence because the pen was carried away by his wit and sense of the comic. If people are ridiculous they should be exposed; and no one is exempt from this law, certainly not bishops, not even Popes, not even saints. Whether it was the ability; or the range of information; or the streak of the irreverent; or whether it was that Acton had an admiring nature for anyone who tried to think – this mind appealed to Acton and soon the pair were not only colleagues on a periodical but close friends. On his side Simpson discovered that they gained not only a young backer

[18] Cf. *Rambler*, 2 (1858), 281.

with money but a journalist with a rare range in history. The journal and the friendship were to bring the young Catholic squire, rising hope of the Church in England, into the same suspicion from the bishops. Already, by the autumn of 1858, the ill-repute reached the Pope's English chamberlain, Monsignor Talbot, who had been kind to Acton in Rome the year before. He now linked him with Simpson and Döllinger as Catholics whose work was to be doubted. And the Pope listened to what Talbot said about the English.[19]

Through an excellent editing of Simpson's letters we now know which anonymous articles in the *Rambler* were written by the young Acton, still only twenty-four when he started. He was devastating like clever young men when they begin to write for the press. Buckle's *History of Civilization*, which was a pretentious effort at social history, received no more ferocious demolition than that by the anonymous Acton in the *Rambler* ('dishonest affectation of knowledge with which he deludes his readers', 'the vulgar practice of reading the books one is to write about was beneath so great a philosopher' – and much else of such scorn). The reviewing had faults, one of which remained with him into maturity. He poured contempt on some writers because they had not read the latest German work on the subject which in Acton's eyes was indispensable. Later he grew out of this sin. But he loved also to cite learned German authorities, sometimes at length; that is, he had the habit of displaying a rare knowledge which was not necessary to his case.

But it was not all scorn. He had heroes: Burke 'the greatest statesman' – this was not only because Burke had a part-Catholic family and advocated the cause of Catholic emancipation. Burke advocated a conservatism on liberal grounds, a philosophy to which Acton was already attuned. His own teacher Lasaulx of Munich was another hero, this time overvalued ('one of the greatest modern scholars'); and these German heroes included Protestants such as Roscher ('one who has no superior among the political historians of the present day'). There is a high value

[19] Cf. Altholtz, p. 75 note.

put upon the Germans – for Acton was half a German – and a low value put upon the French, a nation which deserved this despotism by an incompetent Napoleon III, and was foolish enough to admire Chateaubriand (ignorant, prejudiced and immoral); with certain exceptions, the Savoyard de Maistre who was so papalist, Montalembert because he stood up against French tyranny. Already Acton had accepted the basic doctrine of the best French Liberal Catholics – 'A free Church implies a free nation' – 'He that deems he can advocate the cause of religion without at the same time the cause of freedom, is no better than a hypocrite and a traitor'. All the British historians he eyed with an unfriendly air – Macaulay because he was foolish enough to believe in progress, Lingard though he was a Catholic, Hume, even Gibbon; and Carlyle, who once did good by introducing German scholarship, is now commiting absurdities in his life of Frederick the Great.

What should Acton do? In 1859 he was twenty-five. It was evident that he had a powerful mind. He could speak French and German fluently and some Italian. He was beginning to be well-read. He could not sit back on the estate at Aldenham as an hereditary Catholic squire and baronet. Dupanloup and others had hoped that he would become a leader of the Catholic lay people in England.

There were three possibilities: go into Parliament and be a politician, enter the diplomatic service, or dedicate himself to his love of history and write. In advising him, his step-father Granville narrowed the choice to the first or last; and much preferred the first, on an excellent and unusual ground. Someone who only achieves the second rank in politics achieves things that are important, whereas someone who only achieves the second rank among historians achieves little. And to understand politics, Granville argued perspicaciously, enables the historian to understand history the better. He pressed Acton to find a seat in Parliament.[20]

A Catholic baronet, not because he was a baronet but because

[20] Granville to Acton, 8121/6/74, 17 March 1857.

he was a Catholic, would almost certainly not be acceptable in an English constituency. It must be an Irish seat. That he was not Irish was a disadvantage; but to the Irish his Catholicism was more important than his mixed race.

In April 1859 Granville wrote to him (he was in Germany, as much to economize on living abroad as to be near Döllinger) that if he would send £700 ('to be spent legitimately and not as bribery') he could be certainly returned to the House of Commons for the Irish seat of Carlow. The head priest of the town had been asked and was in favour. In 1859 Acton became MP for Carlow. The newspapers at first reported it as a Conservative victory but they were wrong; and when this was clear he was unjustly abused in the *Daily News* (18th May 1859) as one who was elected in his absence or because of his absence and was guilty of bad manners and impertinence.

To go into the House of Commons did not seem the obvious way to study history which was becoming his passion. To have such a man in the House was an advantage to the rarefied upper class of English Catholics. They were pleased with him. He still looked like the rising hope of English Catholicism.

But soon the contentment was less. He did not appear in Carlow for the election and for two years after the election he was seen in the town only once. Those close to him soon worried when they heard him talking of giving up his seat. He was passionate to study and do what he could for the Catholic cause by writing and politics felt to him an intrusion. In August 1861 he told his stepfather that he wanted to resign his seat. Granville was very sorry, and his letter to Acton showed that he was angry. 'Your poor mother would have been miserable at the thought of it.' (His mother died the year before.) 'If you marry it would make a difference to the position of your wife in England. All the Catholics whom I saw in Ireland thought you had a great future. Exert yourself. It would be moral cowardice to run away. It appears madness to give up the battle beforehand.'[21]

[21] 8121/6/113.

His contributions to the *Rambler*, and then to its successor (1862–3) the *Home and Foreign Review*, have strong characteristics. In longer articles he could bore the reader, the point is made at length. He could be crisp in shorter notes. He was very traditional in certain Catholic attitudes – the Dark Ages laid the foundations of our happiness and our civilization, when the people were truly Catholic; the Reformation caused the decline and the miseries of the modern centuries; because the Church rests on conscience it is the enemy of every form of despotism, whether wielded by monarchs or by democrats; the Church and its laws are the safeguard of true freedom. On top of these old axioms, he believed that the Germans – that includes all the Germanic tribes – were the peoples whose directness and strength linked with the Christian inheritance from Rome to beget a truly civilized world.

He showed much thought over the nature of history. It must be not only a history of events and a social analysis, but a history of mind. Several times he wrote articles on the development of history in his generation and sometimes they are profound and sometimes they leave the reader with the impression that this young historian still struggles with the nature of his craft. He was aware of the risk that every historian sees events with the prejudice which is the axiom of his own generation, and unconsciously assumes that whichever side won the victory was the better; of the fatal effect if historians make their description of the past a dry series of facts – though two of his own articles have sections which are open to this charge; of the difference made to history by the new ability to check and compare old evidence; and in Church history, of the necessity to abandon old and valued legends if the historian proves them not to be based upon reality. He had no contempt for those who valued old legend; and saw that a legend that is believed tells us something about the age in which it is valued. But history is truth and a Church accepts as part of God's gift whatever truth is proven.

He was very frank over the inadequacy of Catholic intellectual

life as he found it, in England; and was over-confident that his own journal would raise its standards.

He suffered one historical disaster, the only big one which he suffered as a historian, though he might have suffered more if he had published more during his life. A forger of the eighteenth century produced a book by King Frederick the Great of Prussia, called *Royal Mornings, or the Art of Reigning.* The author hated Frederick and wished to represent him as immoral and without conscience as a politician and military leader and so put worse than the principles of Machiavelli into his mouth. When Napoleon was in Berlin his secretary discovered a copy of the text and this was what was republished and which Acton had. He accepted it as genuine and wrote a review of it as *The Confessions of Frederick the Great.*

This disaster was caused by two pieces of Acton's mind which affected his history all his life even when he was mature. In his young years he acquired the belief that all governments are bad; some less bad than others but wishing to restrict the freedoms of the individual for the benefit of the whole and all willing to accept that a moral law which applies to men and women cannot apply to their governments; that *reason of State* is a prime source of tyranny and democratic governments are as liable to misuse it as any other form of constitution. Therefore, if a king with an almost absolute power said that the only way to govern well is for the ruler to be unscrupulous, this was a marvellous illustration of a continual danger which afflicts all governments.

It mattered to Acton that this new Machiavelli was a Prussian king. He was half a Rhinelander by descent from his mother. He had many links with Bavaria and was soon to marry a Bavarian. His guide in life was the Christian leader of Bavaria. Both the Rhinelander and the Bavarian in his background resented the steps, not always acceptable ethically, by which the Prussian State worked towards its modern dominance in Germany.

The second trait which made him apt to think this forgery genuine was a natural weakness which afterwards kept reappearing. He found history fascinating and part of the excite-